



FORT HOYLE:

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE FIELD ARTILLERY'S POST ON GUNPOWDER NECK

Shortly after the armistice that ended World War I, the U.S. War Department initiated a demobilization policy to reduce troop strengths and return the Army to a peacetime status. This demobilization plan severely affected Edgewood Arsenal, a Chemical Warfare Service post covering most of Gunpowder Neck in Maryland. Edgewood Arsenal had been in existence since 1918 and consisted of chemical agent production plants, shell-filling plants, troop barracks, and artillery ranges. The reduction in troop strengths and virtual halting of chemical weapon production resulted in many of the buildings being underutilized.

A War Department Directive dated April 7, 1921 selected Gunpowder Neck as the site for a new Field Artillery post. Although the Chemical Warfare Service had expected to loan a portion of Edgewood Arsenal to the new field command, many within the service were unhappy with the plan. In fact, Brigadier General Amos A. Fries, Chief of the Chemical Warfare Service, wrote to the Secretary of War criticizing the plan.



The protests, however, went unheeded and General Orders 40, dated October 7, 1922 created Fort Hoyle from a large section of Edgewood Arsenal. The fort was named after the late Brigadier General Eli D. Hoyle who died on July 27, 1921. General Hoyle had been one of the founders of the Field Artillery and a colonel of the 6th Field Artillery Regiment. In a letter to General Hoyle's widow, Secretary of War John W. Weeks wrote, "The principal object in naming

this permanent post after General Hoyle is to keep ever before the Army personnel a name that meant duty, honor and integrity."

Field Orders No. 4 dated September 22, 1922, assigned the 6th Field Artillery Regiment, along with the Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Field Artillery Brigade, to the new post. The regiment was part of the 1st Artillery Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division and had served in Europe during World War I. After demobilization, the regiment had been assigned temporarily to Camp Dix and its summer training camp at Camp Welsh (Montauk Point, NY). The regiment, a horse mounted unit, left Camp Dix on October 11 and arrived at Fort Hoyle on October 18, 1922.

Despite the excitement of a new fort, the artillerymen quickly discovered that they had been assigned to approximately 2,300 acres of cleared farmland, woods, and swamps. The fort consisted of some troop barracks, two old farmhouses, three wartime warehouses, and not much else. There were no officers' quarters, stables, gun sheds, or even a recreational center. Life, at least initially, did not look very comfortable for the artillerymen. The other Field Artillery units soon referred to them as "Mud Hens."

Although the Commander of Fort Hoyle wanted to create a self-sufficient post, lack of funding prohibited any large expansion effort and forced Fort Hoyle to work closely with Edgewood Arsenal. This meant Fort Hoyle and Edgewood had to share both facilities and personnel assignments. This awkward relationship caused numerous petty disputes between the two posts.

Gradually the differences were overcome and the artillerymen spent more time upgrading the firing ranges and improving their post to conform to their needs. The new fort allowed the Field Artillery to work closely with the Chemical Warfare Service on experimentation, tactics, and training for the use of chemical warfare. The 1920s and 1930s were a time of peace and during this era, the regiment primarily spent its time training and providing equipment and men for ceremonial events. The training often consisted of forced marches sometimes up to 135 miles and lasting six days. The average soldier always complained about these marches and thought the officers showed more concern for the welfare of the horses than for the men.

During the 1930s, Fort Hoyle was finally able to initiate a limited construction program that added officers quarters, a club, theater, gymnasium, chapel, stables, gun sheds, and a laundry. In 1938, Fort Hoyle added a riding hall. This large building was used to train Field Artillery officers in the management of horses, and for horse shows, drills, and jumping contests. In addition, the artillerymen cleared many of the firing ranges, built observation towers, roads, and installed a range telephone system. The artillerymen also decided that the most suitable location for a drill and review ground was in the San Domingo Field area of the post. The current road system, however, required passing through the Edgewood Arsenal chemical plants to reach this field. The artillerymen, therefore, constructed a new road and built a bridge across Canal Creek to provide a direct route to the San Domingo portion of the fort.



In 1939, more problems with the jurisdiction of the firing ranges resulted in ill feelings between Edgewood Arsenal, Fort Hoyle, and Aberdeen Proving Ground, which also used the ranges. These disagreements intensified as the United States began emergency planning as war seemed imminent in Europe. On June 7, 1939, the original range agreements from 1921 were rescinded by directive. The new directive gave Aberdeen Proving Ground the

highest priority for use of the ranges. The next highest priority went to the Chemical Warfare School and then research, development and acceptance tests required by the Chemical Warfare Service. Only after these three came all other training and testing by Fort Hoyle. In the directive, the Secretary of War encouraged the three organizations to cooperate as much as possible.

With World War II on the horizon, on August 21, 1939, Major General Walter C. Baker, Chief of the Chemical Warfare Service, called for the removal of Fort Hoyle from Edgewood Arsenal land because the space was needed to expand the Chemical Warfare Service. With the outbreak of war in Europe, the War Department soon responded to the Chemical Warfare Service request. General Orders No. 8, dated September 16, 1940, disestablished Fort Hoyle and returned the land to Edgewood Arsenal.

Although little remains as visual evidence of the existence of Fort Hoyle, several buildings constructed during the Fort Hoyle days still remain. In 1942, the Chemical Warfare Service converted Fort Hoyle's riding hall to a gymnasium and recreation hall for use of its troops. This building (E4210) was renamed Hoyle Gymnasium in 1962 and is still in use as a gymnasium. Fort Hoyle's headquarters was in one of the original 1918 troop barracks. This building (E4405) still has the original columns on the front of the building and contains the post library. Fort Hoyle's Post Theater (E4810), built in 1934, was remodeled into a modern conference center in 1985. The Fort Hoyle officer's quarters built in the 1920s near the Gunpowder River are still in use as officer's quarters. All of Fort Hoyle's horse stables, however, were removed and the site used for additional troop barracks in the 1960s.



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